



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

LIFE, INC. A Rhetoric Lesson

Philippe-Joseph Salazar

**Distinguished Chair in Humane Letters
Faculty of Humanities**

**Inaugural Lecture
May 8, 2002**

New Series No. 228

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**Published by the University of Cape Town
Department of Communication & Development**

ISBN 0-7992-2196-1

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A RHETORIC LESSON

Tonight is not a banal Wednesday evening. Tonight is uncommon because last Sunday was not a banal Sunday either. Those among you who bother to read the Sunday press will recognise the following journalistic banter:

"I am tired of rhetoric, enough with verbal maneuvering, let's talk straight about the matter at hand."

"At long last, plain talk, no more blah-blah."

Have you recognised this dialogue? The Sunday paper I have just quoted was actually read from the pulpit, in Catholic churches. It is the Gospel of John (16: 24, 27). The interlocutors are Jesus and the Apostles. Last Sunday was the fifth Sunday after Easter. And, tonight, end what were called, in times of stricter observance, the three "Days of rogations," when public prayers used to be held to ward off "pest, famine and war" - in today's political language, ill-health, poverty and crime. Priests would lead a procession through the countryside. They would bless and sprinkle the four corners of fields, in a ritual of reconciliation of created man with created nature.

In fact, tonight is the vigil of Ascension Day. Not so banal an evening for an inaugural lecture by a professor in humane letters who also, as my students in the audience will tell you, professes rhetoric, wouldn't you agree with me?

Why, you may ask, am I evoking religious rituals? What have in common the Ascension of Christ, its effect on humane affairs, rural processions and this academic ritual? To add to your confusion, let me now quote from the *First Prayer-Book* of Edward VI :

"So, when the lord had spoken unto them, he was received into heaven, and is on the right hand of God. And they wente furth and preached every where." (Marc 16: 19-20).

A story is being told, indirectly, concerning rhetoric and what used to be called *litteræ humaniores*, humane letters, in the Renaissance. It goes as follows.

Upon the Ascension, the Eleven, soon the Twelve, set about to do their work - to spread the Word, worldwide. Theirs also was a rhetorical work of aspersion of

worldly fields with words. But the Apostles would not deal with man's material well being (health, food and safety) but man's spiritual, cultural, shall we say, well-being, and this, oddly enough, worldwide. All things considered, the addition of Paul, the 12th man, an outsider, to their narrow-based group, which he joined as Apostle of Nations, adding to the proselytes an element of diversity, as we would say today, was a smart move. Without him there would have been no worldwide spreading of the Word. The ritual of Ascension mass, in fact, sums up this sensational claim of humanity's being cared for, when, at the offertory, a hymn is sung, announcing the jubilant noise made by the Divine Word erupting, in plain talk, onto the world stage. It is about joy, as in the Latin Bible:

"Ascendit Deus in jubilatione, et Dominus in voce tubæ" (Psalms 46:6).

Coincidences, such as the timing of this inaugural lecture are, for scholars like me, poetic moments. Scholars take life more seriously, or should in any event, than most people, because, for us, the world, "out there" as fools say, is a source of coincidences. In a scholar's life everything is incorporated. "Life, Inc." is the title of my talk tonight. Scholars behave, or should behave, in very much the same way as the Apostles did. They do speak "plain talk" and wear "plain clothes," (perhaps not tonight, but I will come back to the red silk I have endorsed) and lead "plain lives." But, like the Apostles who perambulated through a sarcastic Roman empire, they know that below all that plain-ness, there is a utter joy, a *gay saber* of coincidences.

Have you now grasped the link between plain talk, Ascension Day, rhetoric, humane letters? I can see that some of you look puzzled. Well, let me untie this Gordian knot.

When Christ said he will no longer speak in riddles, and the Apostles welcomed straight talking, a serious problem arose.

I am not referring to the fact that Jesus spoke a western Semitic dialect, yet told his team to go and do the work worldwide, presumably in all tongues. It is not, either, that he spoke an inspired language, now to be moulded in man-made dialects. The rhetorical problem lies with the Apostles themselves. These men were still un-inspired, all too human, now charged with this extra-ordinary mission to talk plainly about Christ. The Gospels are quick to fix a solution. Sunday, next week, Christians will celebrate Pentecost, the quickest language crash course ever, when the Apostles mastered all languages spoken in the Roman Empire for the practical purpose of predication (Acts 2: 1-11). So goes the tale. But, from the historical reality of the phenomenal spreading of the Christian message across the Roman and Greek world, we can draw a simple lesson regarding rhetoric and humane letters as well.

What the Apostles had to acquire was not a skill in languages. It was the ability to use language skilfully. The Apostles, right up to Stephen (First Martyr and

first Christian rhetor as he was no longer in presence of the Word incarnate but his first rhetorical imitator), had to master a persuasive use of language in order to realise conversions. But, as they stepped on the road and began to preach at road forks and on market places, the culture they were dealing with was unused not only to their message but to the very notion of a divine Word.

The cultural world they encountered was profoundly rhetorical. Cities, from Asia Minor to Britannia, from Mauretania to Germania, were run along lines of civic and popular decision-making that stressed the necessity of public deliberation, the cultural display of public speaking, the popular contest of judicial rhetoric, what the Greeks once named “the great oath,” that is how we, men and women living in an organized society, swear, in imitation of the Gods arresting internecine war, to resolve our disputes through deliberation. Deliberative rhetoric, alongside shows of ceremonial rhetoric, buttressed and enhanced by a culture of humane letters – literature and science and ethics, also encapsulated in the word “philosophy” – produced and enhanced a belief in and a practice of “man as the measure of all things.” Rhetoric and humane letters and political deliberation and civic responsibility went hand in hand. This is the world Apostles were to encounter, a world for which dogmatic pronouncements were untenable as contrary to human justice and practical wisdom.

Pentecost, the way I see it, was not really about the Apostles being suddenly able to talk Greek or Latin or Punic but realizing that, for their message to gain ground outside the pastoral confines of Galilee, to gain ground in a *political* world, it had to become rhetorical. God met the *polis*. God had to civilize itself. The Apostles knew they needed to make a case, to build arguments, to provide evidence, to anticipate refutations – they had to start becoming *literate* themselves.

Open Clement of Alexandria’s *Tapestries*, and you will see how torn the first educated Christians were, torn between the demands of living in the Greco-Roman world of deliberation, supported by “philosophy” and modes of life based on opinion, and the imperatives of preaching the holy Writ. But, whatever they thought of it, the divine word had to adapt to human conditions to be persuasive. It took Augustine to accommodate rhetoric to the Christian doctrine. But, open now Thomas Aquinas, and you will see how rhetoric is harnessed to the priestly “triple gift.” To celebrate mass, to teach catechesis, to preach. Note: a sermon is to preach people who are already convinced. For the Greeks and the Romans an orator never “preaches converts.” It would make no sense. He deliberates on transient opinions with a view to propose a policy, a course of action. So, regardless of Christ’s incarnation, and passion, his Word now had to become rhetorically incorporated in “public life,” that unique invention of Greco-roman civility, on which rests, still today, our political humanity.

This encounter between a prophetic world, to give it its name, and a rhetorical world brought in contact two estranged cultures of communication.

It also set into motion the enduring, anti-Greek, conflict between opinion and truth, reason and faith, belief and science. In sum, it traced the jousting enclosure for later clashes between the mild voice of what is arguable and the harsh voice of what is deemed unarguable. An anecdote: perhaps you will recall a debate about maintaining or discarding the mention of God in the post-apartheid Constitution, and how some zealots having no other argument to offer than “this is a God-fearing country,” Desmond Tutu shut them up with a smart retort: God does not need a Constitution to exist. Yet, push the good archbishop’s argument further and you would find yourself staring at the very problem the Apostles faced: as a democratic Constitution is the result of public deliberation, the *polis* of the Greeks, then God cannot be part of it. In other words, the zealots had missed the point, that God is, truly, unarguable. Christian *caritas* is not a matter for debate either. By contrast, the Romans called the respect we owe, as political and social beings, to man’s ability to argue without resorting to violence: *humanitas*, humanity. The Greeks used just as potent an expression: *bios politikos*, a citizen’s life. Rhetoric is man measuring himself to the world of men, through debate.

The question is: why, today, do we consider “rhetoric” as detrimental to this very “political life,” which it helped create in the first place? It may be that, unlike the Apostles who soon discovered that, because no one was under any *obligation* to believe their religious tale, they had both to convince *and* to persuade, we often forget that rhetoric has two ends, two aims, two functions. When we discard an argument as “mere rhetoric,” it means that we have lost the sense of this dual function. What are these two ends?

One aim (called the external end) is to persuade an audience, the other aim (the internal end) is to summon all the resources of method and to fabricate an argument, while being acutely aware, all along, that your respondent, right in front of you, believes, just as hard as you do, in what is being counter-argued. This distinction, one of the standards of rhetoric, helps understand a central issue. Once you have moved into a culture where debate and argued confrontation are deemed crucial to human interaction, and not merely as the praise of the powerful or the incantation of ideology, once you have accepted that this life in a civil society is incorporated in debate and incorporates relative truths, that come and go as needed for the utility of living together, you have to learn to make an argument. Like the Apostles did. Indeed, a street-wise politician, with regard to democracy, just as a smart speaker with regard to rhetoric, can achieve external ends, that is, be persuasive without making an argument. A pun, a gesture, an idea thrown at the right moment can be persuasive. But such persuasion has its limitations. It responds

to no rule, it is unregulated, it is, strictly speaking, *stochastic*. Its effects will work today and may not work tomorrow. Such effects of persuasion are entirely bound to occasion: a given audience, a given moment, a given mood.

By contrast, if we are serious about the humanity of political, and social life, a modicum of adherence to internal end is needed, so that our public space may take shape by regular and regulated transmissions of arguments. Why is regulation so important? Because the process of persuasion, in a democracy, cannot be limited to this speaker or this politician or this situation or this audience. The humanity of civic deliberation, democracy in short, lies in the capacity for arguments to be reproduced by others, who incorporate arguments. To learn to *make* an argument is a process by which we gain true “empowerment.” Unless we are able to grasp why an argument works, and to perceive a regular link from cause to effect, the speaker has failed us. Think about it: an argument that cannot be reproduced by us, in our own words, in our own time, for our own purposes, is a bad argument. It may have fulfilled the external end of the speaker, but it has failed the internal end of the community.

In that respect, democracy has little need for “imagination” or, worse, “vision,” which often is dogmatism ashamed of declaring its true colours. But it has a much greater need for its citizenry to be trained in the why’s and how’s of making a point, and conceding a point, and fully realizing that “truth” is not part of the business of living together. Arguing a viewpoint is. Enabling others to own your argument is. Humbling oneself in the relative contention of beliefs is. Rhetoric, and its sustenance, “culture,” another word for “humane letters,” is the art, the business, the know-how of weighing, like the character in Vermeer’s so-called *Goldweiger*, the *pro* and the *contra* of life, social interaction more particularly. You may cringe at my using the word “business.” It is in fact a neat translation, perhaps a tad colloquial, of the Greek expression for “rhetoric,” *tekhnē rhetorikē*, the “business of deliberation,” the business of getting on with the *bios politikos*, and how to follow the right track.

Which brings us to my first visual. Imagine that someone is narrating a story while you are looking at this picture (*Illustration 1*, between p.8 and p.9).

“At the Foundation Maeght, above Saint-Paul de Vence, a castellated village in the hinterland of Nice and Cannes stands, facing the steep valley and the distant Mediterranean, a tall metal sculpture by Miró. It is propped on a wall of dry stones, along a path set between tall pines. The sculpture together with its luminous backdrop of land-, air-, and seascapes *fait tableau* like the French put it, which need not be translated. The sculpture is called: *The Pitchfork*.”

What I find attractive about it is its calculated serenity. On an elongated triangle, some three meters tall (I don’t have the exact measurements), resembling

some primitive column, rests a triangular shape with a rounded lower side, soldered to the tall pedestal. The sculptor has paid great attention to proportions. Follow my pointer. The triangle is cut out of a metal square that measures a third of the length of the elongated triangle. A circular hole is actually punched through the plate, of a diameter slightly wider than the base of the pedestal. Note that this slight difference is a correction to visual distortion as it makes both look equal although they are not. On the apex of the triangular sheet the pitchfork is balanced, its long handle sloping to the right, the fork itself being on the left, pointing up and East, towards sky and sea. The whole length of the fork is equal to the height of the metal pedestal plus the base of the triangle up to the hollowed centre of the circle. In fact, I am quite sure the pitchfork, ripped from its support and held upright against the two-tiered plinth, would have the tip of its five prongs draw a horizontal line through the centre of the circle that would connect with sides of the triangle, thus designing a perfect isosceles. But, should the fork loosen its grip and rotate on its axis, it would trace a magnificent circle against the sky, a circle that would divide in two equal segments the height of its pedestal. Not bad, for a painter more noted for colourful squiggles proud parents and interactive method brain-washed teachers dare compare with their kiddies' crayonnages.

A first glance, in the cold radiance of a winter, as I saw it myself, with shimmers of sleet in the cuspings of the parapet and a veil of frost on its rusted coating, the *Pitchfork* told me a tale of immutability. This impression is reinforced by the rampart-like stolidity of the rusticated masonry, the serene tallness of the black bark of pines, the massive yet gentle landscapes of the lower Alps descending in stable steps towards tabular Mediterranean. I took a walk back to the gallery to have a cup of coffee and a light lunch. I returned, as the sun was higher in the sky. The sculpture was lit from the front, as if a painter had decided to cast light from another angle. It had lost its razor sharp definition, which, from afar, made the sculpture resemble a lino cut. The landscape, the bluish haze of the valley, had gotten more defined. Red-roofed houses and even private gardens were clearly visible. Later that afternoon, as the winter sun descended rapidly, I went again to look at the *Pitchfork* before motoring back to Nice. It was now feebly lit from the right and the rear. It looked massively sombre, hewn out of funeral marble.

I realized the obvious. The sculpture was a timepiece, a fantastic grandfather's clock with its pendulum, its dial and its asymmetrical hands. Imagine a balance-wheel clock stripped of its inner mechanisms, its cogs and springs turned inside out, soldered, exposed and planted by a fanciful mind in a garden, to resemble the paragon of all timepieces, a standing sundial of the primitivest sort. This eviscerated clock did not tell the time, it was *told* the time of the day by the sun tracing its course around it and casting light on its calculus of shapes.

As I drove back along the winding road towards Cagnes, the Mediterranean had put on violent shades of purple. A storm was gathering over what Italians call the Ligurian Sea. This sculpture is no banal time indicator, I thought, it points to the sea. The hand showing the hours is a five-pronged fisherman fork, Neptune's quindent, as it were. I realized the less obvious. This timepiece partakes in myth. It does not tell of time hourly, daily, even yearly. The *Pitchfork* makes manifest time in the everlasting return of the same question in which Friedrich Nietzsche situated what he called "superman" not from reading Jules Verne's, but from the philosophical conceit that, if the same question is asked repeatedly, it implies that, at some stage, the questioner must rise above the question, be "superior" to the question itself.

The *Pitchfork* tells a Nietzschean tale of questioning our place on earth. It rotates on the purest geometrical forms, as geo-metry is the measuring of earth expressed in its essential forms, circle, square, line. The hands of the clock are a line: the fork handle is a line spliced into five diverging then parallel lines, the prongs. One step further: the *Pitchfork* is about generating space from the point. Against the backdrop of alleys, and gardens, and trees, this natural and human space, it shows us the kernel of space, the point: the point on which the fork rests on the dial has been elongated into a line, then divided in a variety of lines, then made to rotate, and create the circle, and in its sweeping scythe cut out all other forms. This timepiece is not about time at all. What we witness here is the creation of space. Not of time. It is a spacepiece. A template. A temple.

As my car found its way through traffic into the coastal avenue leading to the airport, passed Cap 3000 shopping mall, I was mulling over the connection to Neptune, so damn obvious. I took the wrong turn-off and got stuck behind a delivery van. I looked at the postcard, the one I have scanned for this presentation. Yet again, a realisation of the obvious. I had overlooked the low wall on which stands the sculpture. It is a parapet guarding the path that winds downhill, along which I had in fact lost my way. The *Pitchfork* stands at the edge of a stony maze, a labyrinth.

Aptly enough, the mythical Labyrinth, in which Theseus fought and slew the Minotaur, represented for the Greeks the ultimate human use of geometry, space mastered by numbers, the well-organized Cretan Empire. In Latin, a labyrinth also means inner labor, *labor intus*. The Man-Bull was a monster: half-man, half-bull, a symbol for the political monstrosity of Cretan culture, the first society of control ever known to the Greeks. The Minotaur is the ferocious and voracious passion some of us have for order. Order is animality regained. Only human beings can create disorder. Nature knows nothing else but order. Disorder is what makes

human nature so un-natural, so superior to Nature, so un-animal. Read Nietzsche. Theseus' inner labor, beneath Knossos the well-ordered city, was, in killing the Man-Bull and escaping from the geometrical entrapment of the Labyrinth, to thwart monstrosity created by order.

The sun was casting its very last rays, from over the mainland, onto the Baie des Anges. I understood yet another meaning to the quindent, the five-pronged pitchfork. It is indeed Neptune's redoubled trident, and does tell us of space made human, and time softening space, for, as you know without time space would remain just that, immobile and sturdy, time makes space takes new shapes. I say that a five-pronged pitchfork is a trident redoubled because, if you take a trident and you slew it round, pivoting it on the hinge of an outer prong, what you get is not a sixdent but a quindent. The *Pitchfork* is two tridents in one, two soldered pitchforks, not one. A sort of labyrinth, a visual pun if you prefer.

The original title, in French, is *La Fourche*. *Fourche* does mean what "pitchfork" says in English, in addition to which it also means, and both meanings are equally common in French, what "fork" also indicates in English, a spliced road. I had obfuscated the French because to have rendered *fourche* by "fork" would have added, in English, a third meaning, a table fork, which the French does not carry. The pitchfork is a fork on a road. In his walk out of the buried Labyrinth, after he slew the Bull, Theseus had to master the geometry of his path to freedom by deciding, at each fork, which way to slew his walk. Each time he chose right. Road fork after road fork, slewing along, he reduced the forking path to a simpler division until he emerged into the sun. Thanks to his *labor intus*, the underground labour of choosing the right path, guided by the thread Ariadne gave him, he reduced the twisted line to a point, the ball of thread he now held in his hand, in the open air, in radiant light. Myth has it, that Theseus' slaying of the Bull founded Athens' freedom, democracy. Mythical times came to an end and Athens entered historical times. Theseus had gained control over a monstrous organisation. Deliberation upon deliberation, he moved on, along that simple line, symbolised by Ariadne's thread. He got out. When he emerged, the Labyrinth was now inhabited with the sound of deliberation and the echo of human choices, no longer with the roars and the lust of a monstrous institution."

Let me sum up: the *Pitchfork* recounts the birth of rhetoric. It fittingly stands near Nice, the double of Athens, Athena Nikaiā, Athena the Victorious. With Athens, with the invention of democracy, rhetoric was born. The open space replaced the secret labyrinth, the public contest of words and ideas replaced the conceit of rules, the acceptance of relative viewpoints replaced doctrinal inflexibility, openness replaced dissimulation, and debating about choices to be made replaced a fate sealed in advance. Humane Letters, literature, philosophy and



Illustration 1 : Juan Miró, La Fourche



Illustration 2 : Z. S. Strother, Inventing Masks, Giwoyo

“natural philosophy,” that is science, the name chosen by my colleague Brian Warner for his own Distinguished Chair, grew on that fertile soil, soldered together by rhetoric.

I have described to you one possible scenario for the invention of man’s freedom and the discovery of rhetoric and the nurturing of Humane Letters, the name I have chosen for this Chair, and one possible scenario for understanding the conflict between types of rhetoric. To tell scenarios and to study scenarios is the very subject of Humane Letters, and of rhetoric in particular. In fact, in rhetorical terminology, “argument” and “scenario” are exactly the same word, and have the same intent. That is: to open up discussion and make people realise that for any event, fact, happening, there is a slate of possibilities, scenarios, fictions, ready to spring up and to materialise. This is why argument is so crucial in life. Your view, at an election, is for me a fiction, yet, when you cast your ballot, that argument and that scenario of yours may well become my reality, for better or for worse.

What I have done tonight, so far, is to tell you stories and show you a picture. When I began preparing for this talk, I had, to be honest, a more pressing worry. What sort of audience would you be? What is an “inaugural lecture”? Is this a “lecture”? What sort of argument am I supposed to make? And to what intended effect?

I looked up the University’s official history. I found nothing about this so-called “tradition” of inaugural lectures. I am told, by a past Vice-Chancellor, that in the 1970s, inaugural lectures were not a regular feature of appointments to professorial Chairs, even when the University was less profligate with her number of professors. I do have some knowledge, as a historian of rhetoric, of medieval and Renaissance forms of inaugural lectures. All this was of little help. We are dealing here with an institutional fiction, a rhetorical scenario.

First point: Is this a “lecture”? A lecture follows rhetorical norms, in terms of style, content, appropriateness to a specific audience. The word “lecture” is far from obvious. It comes from Latin *lectio*. It means “reading.” Why so? Because, late into the 17th century, reading was done aloud, even for oneself. It was a part of rhetorical training. Scholars were taught to master up to 40 voice inflexions to render and to understand the meaning of a text which was glossed upon during the *lectio*. In a culture that spanned nearly 20 centuries, a scholastic lecture was a public reading of texts or commentaries upon texts that hardly ever changed. Some universities still have the title of “reader.” And lecturers’ lives are still this repetitive incorporation of readings on behalf of their students. A lecture is always a

surrogate reading.

In the Renaissance, a powerful emblem was, now and again, used to describe the art of lecturing as well as the effect of Humane Letters – the image of a female bear licking her newly born cubs into shape. To lecture is to give human shape to minds. The tongue gives shape to minds. The function of a lecturer remains today what it was in the *lectio*, this ability to read persuasively and have materials otherwise obtuse become, with conviction, a *body* of knowledge. This is why distance-learning remains just that : distant learning. And is no learning, just data collecting. A live lecturer is a reader with a rhetorical voice. A good *lectio* is an *electio*, a good lecture provides the right choice, the persuasive choice of materials, that no electronic retrieval can provide, of materials read and assimilated and argumentatively performed by a lecturer, with a view to shaping an audience. Like Theseus' choice, a lecturer's choice is, should be, on how to work knowledge from within, *labor intus*. However, the requisite is to know your audience. Tonight, not knowing who would be my audience, apart from imagining a hall with colleagues, friends and a handful of graduates in rhetoric, I was not able to place my voice in advance. What audience were I to persuade, and of what? Have you noticed? No grand literary authors, no stupefying erudite quotes, no authoritative technical references, no scientific guarantees, not even a show of slides my esteemed colleagues in the Medical School are, quite rightly in their case, so fond of. None of the stilts we use, in our profession, to seem taller than we really are. Two folktales and a postcard.

To compound our shared stupefaction : what is an “inaugural?” Strictly speaking, this is not an inaugural. I have been lecturing, in this specific Distinguished Chair, as it is graciously titled, for two years already. Rhetorically speaking, what is it that I am doing here tonight if it is not a lecture, not an inaugural, if I am unable to envision my audience?

What I am formulating is, you would tell me if questions were allowed at the end, a “rhetorical question.” It is not. A standard question in rhetoric studies relates to what we call “rhetorical traditions.” How traditions of persuasion come to be incorporated into the life of an institution, and how they remain in place although their primary, intended effect has vanished. “This is,” I was told, “our tradition.” What a paradoxical statement! Tradition glorifies memory. But, in this case, I have found no memorial as to why such a tradition. One pointer to understand tonight's event, may be the trappings of this solemn occasion. Red robes and tasselled bonnets and silky words. The University is, in the words of our Vice-Chancellor, “show-casing” herself, presenting to “the public,” you, her *ethos*; and she expects her inaugurated professor to embody, to incorporate, the values of this scholarly community. Here lies the rhetorical twist. Even if I do not praise the University tonight in this speech, my giving a speech is in itself a celebration of the institution,

a “demonstration” as we say in rhetoric of her values, as I apply my very best skills at showing what a UCT professor does. At issue: rhetorical acts must never be left to exist at random. Traditions are expedient and useful when they are questioned. Expediency is the heart of deliberative politics. To expedite is to act with a specific use in view. Rhetorical acts, because they engage values, activate deliberation and are conducive to action, must be carefully devised and conceived and delivered so that they reach, like Theseus walking out of the maze, their maximum effect.

To illustrate my point, and lead you a step closer to my conclusion, let me show you a second picture. It is a mask. It was collected by colonialists around 1910, in the Eastern Pende region of Belgian Congo. It is called *Givoyo* (Illustration 2, between p. 8 and p. 9).

The mask *Givoyo* is composed of three parts. The head is box-like, with a blackish top, on which sometimes feathers were attached, and a face coloured in red clay, *musège*. The features are sharply chiseled. Shown in profile, the mask presents three parallel lines: forehead, eyebrows and a nose. Mouth and chin recede into the second part of the mask, the collar. Seen from the front, the face is carved in triangular slits and ridges, two for the eyebrows, one of the nose, two for the cheekbones, two for the lips. The second part of the mask, the wimple, shows, below four thin white lines, a decoration of small triangles, a guilloche pattern of white kaolin and black onto the red clay-coloured background. The third part of the mask is in the shape of a flat horn that curves outwards. A black and white diamond pattern picks up the triangular decoration of the wimple, on a larger module. A ridge runs along the whole length of the mask, right in the middle, halving face and breastplate. A fringe of *pusu*, raffia, adorns the mask from ear to ear. You will note that the mask is blind and mute. Its slit eyes are closed and its lips are sealed. You cannot breathe, you cannot speak, you cannot see through this mask.

Consider this: the mask *Givoyo* is not a mask. Technically, *Givoyo* is a headdress, worn backward, with the snout protruding from the forehead of its bearer. Culturally, *Givoyo* was, before becoming a carving or a mask, a dance. Ethnography tells us, it is a dance turned into a mask. In Pende culture, dances are performed when a social problem arises. Ancient Greeks practised them. So, did Europeans in the 17th century, remember Purcell's Masks. So, do we. Think of the Love Parade in Berlin. A dance is the anticipation or simulation of actions to be taken by a community in order to solve a problem, in this case the basic problem of food. The dance simulates a public debate. For that reason, masks are also mementos, movements of a dance captured in wood, private passions and social unrest and antagonistic viewpoints cast into a festive form that is acceptable to all. The carver, in fact, comes last in this communal process of creation. When the

sculptor hews the wood and carves the shape with his *adze*, he knows he is giving a tangible and visible face to his community. The community rewards him, feeds him delicate food-like manioc carrots and fried plantain, and regales him with palm wine. Later on, the dance will be performed at appointed times, as a ritual of commemoration of the first dance that led to the creation of the mask, and the simulation of a communal debate that, for all intents and purposes, helped find a solution to a problem that endangered social harmony.

To sum up: a mask does not mask, it reveals. In the case of *Givoyo*, known as “the maternal uncle” or senior mask, the dance ritual, during which it is exhibited, takes place outside the village. The dancers perform the dance in the long grass that surrounds the village, in the *paradeisos* would the Bible say – the garden of life where social interaction is friendly, food abundant, joy frequent, people attuned to nature and to each other. In this specific case, *Givoyo* recalls the time before the devastation caused by the oil palm trade and rubber extraction, the system of portage, the interdiction of traditional medicine and hunting, the ethnographic regrouping of villages – in short, the utter destruction of a self-sustaining culture by Belgian colonial capitalism, another form of non-deliberative politics, akin to the Cretan monstrosity I described earlier on. *Givoyo* the dance-mask helps recall a stage in communal life when decisions were not handed down by colonial officers but debated among villagers.

Rhetoric, dance, mask, inaugural lecture have something in common. What is it?

Do you recall the remittance ceremony of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in October 1998? Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, to everyone’s astonishment, danced side by side, in exultation and celebration of a nation reconciled. The TRC report was, in a manner of speaking, an inauguration : it marked a new beginning, when South Africans could face each other and agree that “let bygones be bygones,” Mandela himself said, so long as “bygones” be consigned to memory and, so goes another cliché, “we own the process.” In remitting the report, Tutu celebrated South Africa’s unique reconciliation with our own past. We had found common ground, where we had lived apart. In rhetoric, by the way, we have a single word to characterize memory, common ground, and clichéd expressions, we use the word “commonplace.” But never mind this, it is too late in the evening. Another time, perhaps. On the other hand, the TRC report concluded a process indeed, of transformation, the acceptance by victims that having perpetrators tell the tale of apartheid, and by perpetrators to tell it publicly, was the way to reconciliation. The TRC report needed another, public and unique celebratory gesture to be made obvious. In rhetoric we

call such a gesture a “demonstration,” when praise, as in a dance or a procession, is part of a communal celebration, is shown around for all to see. In other words : the TRC demonstration cancelled out the monstrosity of apartheid. What better demonstration than a dance? Not only did their stately dance expunge the sometimes deadly *toyi toyi* dance, the TRC itself singled out as a cause for deadly abuses during the Liberation struggle. Better, this peaceful *toyi toyi*, not unlike the Greek processional dance that celebrated victors at Olympia, and is a source of “demonstrative rhetoric,” made vivid, for all of us to see, that we now had become citizens and moved into the *paradeisos* of democracy, out of the labyrinthine calculations of apartheid. The report gave substance to the new Constitution. The dance made political music : “It will be an inferior sort of a city, the city that, unlike a symphony, is reduced to a single rhythm or to a single beat.”

So, tonight, what is the dance that justifies the fur-trimmed hood and the red silk robes I am wearing, and give this mask, as it were, its meaning? Quite simply, the foundation act of the University. My concept of an inaugural lecture is that *any* lecture recalls, or should recall, the foundation of this University, is a repeat performance of the University’s inauguration. I am not sure that, as a *universitas*, a community of scholars, we have given much thought to the deliberative foundation of what we, professors in cathedras and lecturers, are actually commemorating each time we address students. Too much time, and money, are spent on defining deliberation as administrative processes, and far too little time on pondering that lectures are, in fact, the founding site for deliberation in a university. We forget the dance. We just wear the mask.

My rhetorical duty, I guess, tonight, was to lift that mask, to question the tradition, to place in front of you thoughts that made me wonder, a month ago, if I should proceed, at all, with this lecture. In a scholar’s life, trust me, there is no room for stochastic, unregulated, gestures. We lead a calculated life. Or we should. I do.

Let me end on a confession. As I was looking with you at *Givoyo* and the *Pitchfork*, and as I was trying to sketch the apostolic paradox of plain talk and imagined an Athenian birth of deliberation, as I was taking you back to October 1998, a thought, a *dynamis* as we say in rhetoric, kept me going. I was experiencing a strange happiness, not the “jubilation” I quoted in Latin an hour ago – but the sort of happiness philosophers call *gaudium*, “Joy.” While I was talking to you tonight, it dawned on me that, for the first time in a very long time, you were offering me the most exact gift an orator could ever desire : a real audience. And for this joy, I thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Anita Saunders, with whom I shared office space when I first joined UCT in 1983 (in the Department of Cultural History of Western Europe), before we began sharing books, and ideas, and soon a nurturing friendship, graced the conclusion of this ritual with a spirited Vote of thanks – she recalled a conversation we had, one late night early morning, a respite of sorts in the spiritual curfew then imposed by apartheid, about Spinoza and the spirit of joy. My turn, now, to thank her, in print, for so many years of unflinching *humanitas* she displayed as a friend, as an artist, as a public figure.

Illustrations

Illustration 1 : Juan Miró, *La Fourche* (source : Fondation Maeght, Paris, Imprimerie Arte).

Illustration 2 : Z. S. Strother, *Inventing Masks. Agency and History in the Art of the Central Pende*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1998, colour plate 7 (source : National Museum of African Art, photography by Jeffrey Ploskonka No. 85-15-5, Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.).

FURTHER READING

Punctilious footnoting does not really belong to the genre of inaugural lectures. However, because cursory references may look like negligent erudition to a probing mind, here is some “further reading.” *Ad lectorem*.

History of Rhetoric

On the Greek invention of rhetoric as anti-nature, the concept of a deliberative compact, as well as the political node of the three rhetorical *genera* (deliberative, epideictic, judicial) and the contrasted notion of political “harmony” in Aristotle and Plato, see Barbara Cassin’s seminal work, *L’effet sophistique*, Paris, Gallimard, Series NRF-Essais, 1995. The quote on political music is taken from Aristotle, *Politics*, Book II, 1263b 31-35.

For an elaboration on the Aristotelian concept of rhetorical ends, see Eugene Garver, *Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

On Thomas Aquinas’ influence on Catholic rhetoric, see my “Christus Orator. About the rhetorical papacy,” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 15(1), June 2002, 111-123.

On scriptural rhetoric, see Yehoshua Gitay, *Isaiah and his Audience. The Structure and Meaning of Isaiah 1-12*, Assen, Van Gorcum, series Studia Semitica Neerlandica 30, 1991. *Religion, Scripture and Theology*, S.E. Porter and Th. H. Olbricht eds., Sheffield, Sheffield Academic

Press, Journal of the New Testament Supplement Series 131, 1996.

On the rhetoric of inaugural lectures, and the question of institutional or (auto)biographical praise (an inaugural is always touched with the brush of narcissism or sycophancy, or both) see my "Huet, ou l'art de parler de soi" in *Pierre-Daniel Huet* (1630-1721), S. Guellouz ed., Paris-Seattle-Tübingen, Series Biblio-17, 83, 1994, 133-140. "Rhétorique et « expérience fictive » : l'Académie," *Littératures classiques* 45, *L'Imagination au XVII^e siècle*, 2002, 297-307.

On secular and religious voice culture in pre-19th century Europe, see my *Le culte de la voix au XVII^e siècle. Formes esthétiques de la parole à l'âge de l'imprimé*, Paris/Genève, Champion/Slatkine, Series Lumière Classique 4, 1995.

On political styles, the bureaucratic and the republican in particular, see Robert Hariman, *Political Style. The Artistry of Power*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, Series New Practices of Inquiry, 1995.

Humane Letters, Rhetoric and the Church Fathers

Of Clement of Alexandria see, for instance, *Stromata*, I, 6 :

"But as we say that a man can be a believer without learning, so also we assert that it is impossible for a man without learning to comprehend the things which are declared in the faith. But to adopt what is well said, and not to adopt the reverse, is caused not simply by faith, but by faith combined with knowledge. But if ignorance is want of training and of instruction, then teaching produces knowledge of divine and human things. But just as it is possible to live rightly in penury of this world's good things, so also in abundance. And we avow, that at once with more ease and more speed will one attain to virtue through previous training. But it is not such as to be unattainable without it; but it is attainable only when they have learned, and have had their senses exercised. "For hatred," says Solomon, "raises strife, but instruction guardeth the ways of life;" in such a way that we are not deceived nor deluded by those who are practised in base arts for the injury of those who hear. "But instruction wanders reproachless," it is said. We must be conversant with the art of reasoning, for the purpose of confuting the deceitful opinions of the Sophists. Well and felicitously, therefore, does Anaxarchus write in his book respecting kingly rule: "Erudition benefits greatly and hurts greatly him who possesses it; it helps him who is worthy, and injures him who utters readily every word, and before the whole people. It is necessary to know the measure of time. For this is the end of wisdom. And those who sing at the doors, even if they sing skilfully, are not reckoned wise, but have the reputation of folly." And Hesiod: "Of the Muses, who make a man

loquacious, divine, vocal.” For him who is fluent in words he calls loquacious; and him who is clever, vocal; and “divine,” him who is skilled, a philosopher, and acquainted with the truth.

On the conflict between culture and faith, in relation to literature, and the status of humane letters, from Tertullian to the 17th century, see my essays: “Les pouvoirs de la Fable: mythologie, littérature et tradition de 1650 à 1725,” *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 91(6), 1991, 878-889 (with a bibliography). “Sur la mémoire sacrée des Lettres” in *La Fabrique de l'œuvre*, V. Kapp ed., Paris-Seattle-Tübingen, Series Biblio-17, 80, 1994, 185-193. “La mémoire sacrée de l'écrivain: Ecritures et fiction,” *Dix-Septième Siècle* 182 (1), 1994, 5-19. “Les voix de la fable ou le bestiaire du duc de Bourgogne” in *Lectures d'Ovide*, E. Bury ed., Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2003, 499-512.

For a broader view on gaudium, “joy”, the gay saber of humane letters, see Marc Fumaroli's detersive Preface (“Loisirs et Loisir”) and first chapter (“*Otium, convivium, sermo* : La conversation comme “lieu commun” des lettrés”), in *Le Loisir lettré à l'âge classique*, essais réunis par Marc Fumaroli, Philippe-Joseph Salazar et Emmanuel Bury, Geneva, Droz, Series Travaux du Grand Siècle 4, 1996, 5-26 and 29-52.

On Augustine's manipulative legacy (in part, about *De Doctrina Christiana*, Book IV) see my essay : “Arnauld Rhéteur,” *Chroniques de Port-Royal* 44, 1995, 163-172 (with a bibliography). The subject is a site for intense disputes, especially among the French Augustinian school of literary studies.

Anthropology

The source for Giwoyo is: Z. S. Strother, *Inventing Masks. Agency and History in the Art of the Central Pende*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

On the rhetoricity of anthropology, see my essays: “*Ut Rhetorica Sociologia* : essai sur une naissance des sciences sociales,” *Cahiers de l'Imaginaire* 4, 1989, 25-36. “The Unspeakable Origin: Rhetoric and the Social Sciences. A Reassessment of the French Tradition” in *The Recovery of Rhetoric. Persuasive Discourse and Interdisciplinarity in the Human Sciences*, R.A. Roberts, J.M.M. Good eds., London/Bristol, Duckworth/ Classical Press, 1993, 101-116. “Académiciens et Africains: une contre-naissance de l'anthropologie 1700-1750” in *Afriques imaginaires. Regards réciproques et discours littéraires*, Ph.-J. Salazar and A. Wynchank, eds., Paris, L'Harmattan, 1995, 19-30. “Rhétorique de la race: l'Afrique Australe au XVIII^e siècle,” *Rhetorica* 14 (2), 1996, 151-165.

Rhetoric and Democracy (with specific reference to South Africa)

I refer to some of my recent publications (with further bibliographies) where some of the

themes sketched here are developed :

Volumes: Guest Editor, *The Public*, Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture 8 (3), Democratic Rhetoric and the Duty of Deliberation, 2001. *Parole Démocratique. Entames rhétoriques*, Paris, Collège International de Philosophie, Series Les Papiers du Collège 56, 2001. *An African Athens. Rhetoric and the Shaping of Democracy in South Africa*, Mahwah, NJ/London, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Series Rhetoric, Knowledge and Society, 2002.

Essays: "Le terroriste: Construction rhétorique d'un objet social" in *Normes juridiques et régulation sociale*, F. Chazel, J. Commaïlle eds., Paris, Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, Series Droit et Société, 1991, 415-421. "Le lien rhétorique: Desmond Tutu, éloquence et nation," *Rue Descartes* 17, Institution de la parole en Afrique du Sud, June 1997, 53-74. "Nelson Mandela ou l'éthique oratoire" in *Êthos et Pathos. Le statut du sujet rhétorique*, François Cornilliat and Richard Lockwood eds., Paris, H. Champion, 2000, 201-209. "Press Freedom and Citizen Agency in South Africa: A Rhetorical Approach," *The Public*, Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture 7 (4), 2000, 55-68. "Perpetrator ou De la citoyenneté criminelle," *Rue Descartes* 36, Philosophies Africaines : traversée des expériences, June 2002, 167-179. "Afrique du Sud. Eloges démocratiques," in Marcel Detienne ed., *Le Genre Humain* 40-41, Prendre la parole, Paris, Le Seuil, 2003, 33-45. "Democratic Deliberation and Some Concepts regarding Democracy in South Africa," Selected Papers, 7th Congress of the Organisation for Social Science Research In Eastern and Southern Africa, Khartoum, 2002 [www.ossrea.org]. "Why the French Do Not Read Tocqueville. And Why We Cannot Question Rhetorical Theory, and Democracy, From an American Perspective Alone," *Review of Communication*, 2003 (in press). "Justice et vérité, positions rhétoriques.(À propos de l'Afrique du Sud)" in *Le sens de la justice*, Ali Benmakhlouf ed., Casablanca, Le Fennec, Series Débats philosophiques, 2003 (in press).

Rhetoric and the Arts

On how to read rhetoric in art, see my essays: *De Arte Graphica de Ch.-A. Du Fresnoy*. Nouvelle traduction française, précédée d'un essai critique. *L'institution de la peinture*, Paris, *L'Alphée*, 1990, 98-121. "Rhétorique de la peinture" in *Texte et Peinture à l'Age Classique*, R. Démoris ed., Paris, Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1992, 87-94. "Poussin ou Peindre la Littérature" in *Et in Arcadia Ego*, A. Soare ed., Paris-Seattle-Tübingen, Series Biblio-17, 100, 1996, 52-63. "Temps, peinture et champ historique chez Roger de Piles," *Cahiers du 17. Interdisciplinary Journal* 7 (1), 1997, 133-148.